

The Superior Daily Telegram

Obey slams Bush, Republicans

By Shelley Nelson
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Those who say there isn't a dime's worth of difference between Democrats and Republicans found agreement from U.S. Rep. Dave Obey when he stopped in Superior today. You're absolutely right, said the Wausau Democrat - there is a \$40 billion difference.

That's how much Congress moved out of low-priority pro-grains in the president's budget into initiatives important to working families, Obey told a modest crowd gathered at the Government Center late this morning. Among those priorities are funding for medical research, education and access to healthcare since Democrats gained a majority in the House of Representatives, he said.

About 40 people turned out to hear from the Congressman, who serves as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, during the one of 20 stops planned throughout the Seventh District

"It's not as much as I'd like, but it certainly is worth the fight," Obey said. "So I think it's clear there's a very big difference between a Congress run by our friends on the other side of the aisle" and Congress controlled by Democrats.

Obey said the public sent two messages with the last election:

- we need a change of direction on the Iraq war
- we need a change in domestic policy.

"But the president stiffed us on both," he said. "We've tried every way known to man to bring this war to a conclusion," Obey said. "The House passed two bills - both of which I sponsored - that would have required a change in direction in Iraq. The president vetoed one and used his friends in the Senate to block the other."

Jean Romans of Superior asked if the Government Accounting Office would ever provide the public with a cost of the war. While \$600 billion has been appropriated so far, Obey said that doesn't take into account the cost for the servicemen and their care through their lifetime. Current estimates he said, approach \$2 trillion.

"I don't think we're ever going to know the cost of the war," Romans told the Congressman. "There are more hidden costs than Vietnam."

Obey agreed. "We're not going to get a change in policy until we get a change in the administration," Obey said. He said this election is about social justice - military families lay it on the line while the rest of the country is told to shop and the nation's wealthiest people get tax cuts.

On the domestic front, President George Bush asked for \$200 billion more in spending for Iraq and another \$50 Billion in tax cuts for people who make more than \$1 million, but he wanted to cut \$16 billion in funding for student aid, cancer research, rural health care and clean water, Obey said.

"We rejected those cuts and instead provided . . . more than \$7 billion in additional funds for veterans' health care - our top priority," he said. "If the president can ask for \$200 billion for the war in Iraq, we felt an obligation to do much more to help those military families who suffered the most because of that war."

In addition, he said \$600 million more than the president wanted was allocated to study diseases like Alzheimer's, cancer, Parkinson's and diabetes, and Congress provided funding to allow community health centers to serve 280,000 more underinsured Americans and high risk

insurance pools to help 200,000 more people afford health insurance.

Pell Grants for hundreds of thousands of working class students were expanded, and Congress blocked more than \$1 billion dollars in presidential cuts to state and local law enforcement funding and beefed up funding for border security, Obey said.

"All of the se hard-fought changes were badly needed but they are still not enough to meet the needs of a growing and changing society," Obey said. Although appropriation bills passed Congress with almost 50 Republicans on average supporting the changes, President Bush vetoed and the Senate filibustered to block other needed changes, he said.

"We fought for these changes because the most well-off one percent of all citizens have hugely increased their share of the nations' wealth and income in recent years at the expense of working families who are being squeezed more and more in their ability to afford education, health care, and other necessities of family life. Their economic security is being squeezed every day, and this time Washington recognizes that fact."

However, with the economy headed for a recession, Obey said there is more that needs to be done. He said in about two weeks, Congress is likely to vote on a package intended to stimulate the economy. The one thing that package won't do, he said, is make permanent tax cuts for the rich.